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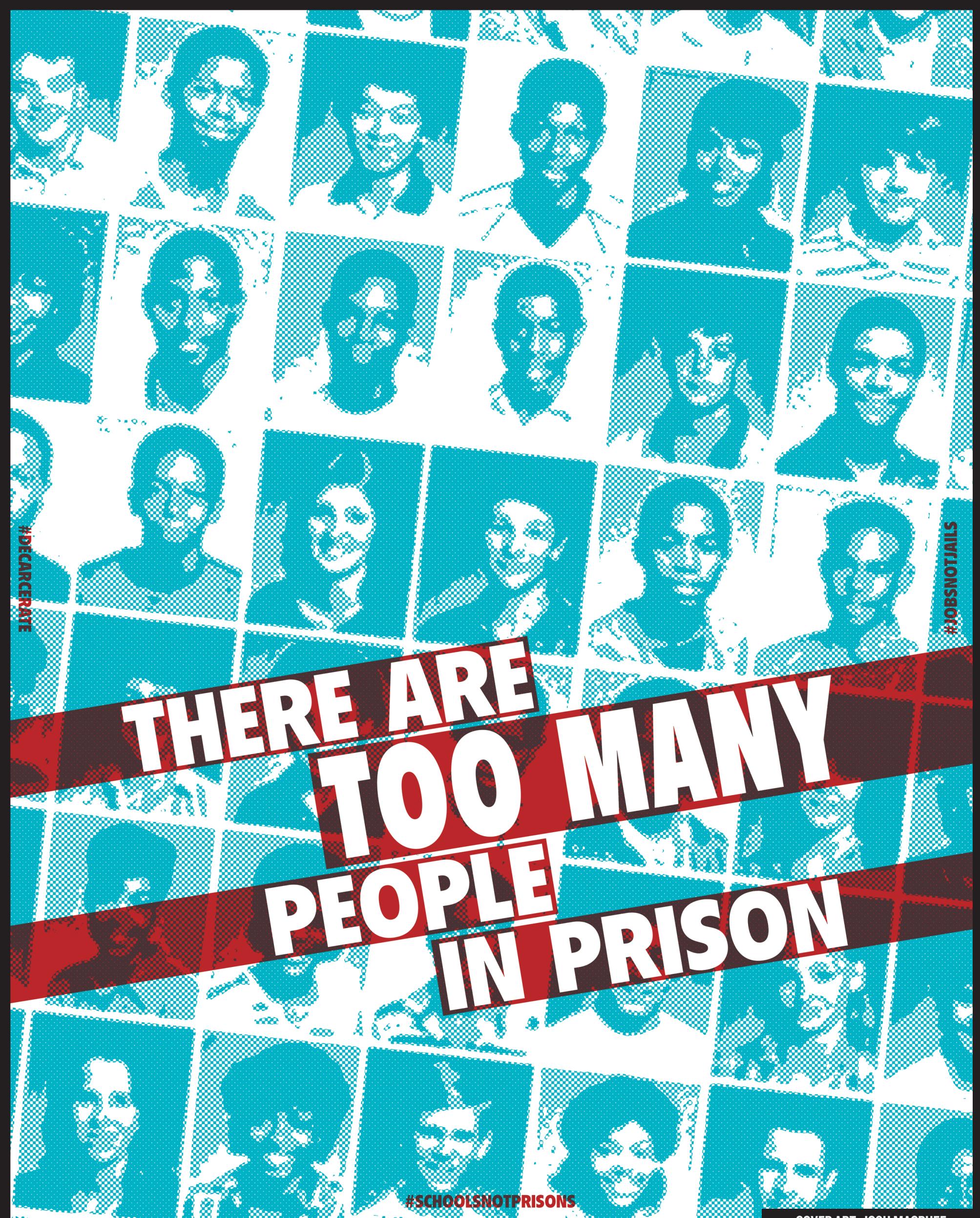
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STREET SHEET



COVER ART: JOSH MACPHEE

MASS INCARCERATION IN THE UNITED STATES

THE TOTAL INCARCERATED POPULATION IN THE U.S. IS A STAGGERING 2.4 MILLION—A 500 PERCENT INCREASE OVER THE PAST 30 YEARS.

In this edition of the Street Sheet, we explore incarceration and detainment from the writing, artwork, and poetry entirely from those who have been imprisoned. We've received over a hundred letters from prisons and jails from across the country from folks who have been incarcerated. These works give us insight into the experiences of those within the criminal justice system and how we can work together to end mass incarceration for our family, friends, and loved ones.

BY THE NUMBERS

The U.S. incarcerates people at a rate higher than any other country in the world—even though the level of crime is similar to other industrialized countries.



The U.S. spent \$ 80 billion on incarceration in 2010 alone.

THE UNITED STATES HAS 5 PERCENT OF THE WORLD'S POPULATION, BUT



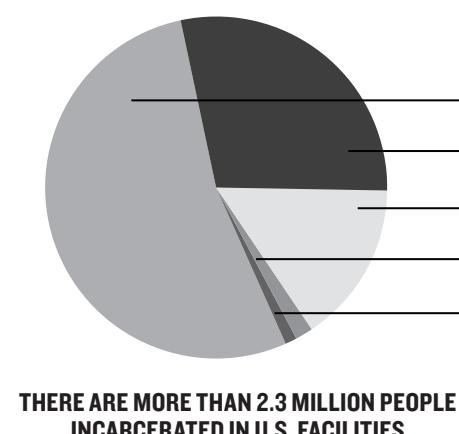
THE TOP 5 U.S. STATES/TERRITORIES WITH THE HIGHEST INCARCERATION RATES (PER 100,000 PEOPLE)



THE NUMBER OF CONVICTIONS IN THE FEDERAL SYSTEM RESULTED FROM GUILTY PLEAS RATHER THAN DECISIONS BY JURIES:

96%

MOST INCARCERATED YOUTH ARE LOCKED UP FOR NONVIOLENT OFFENSE. THERE ARE 34,000 YOUTH BEHIND BARS, BUT FOR 7,000 OF THOSE YOUTH ARE ONLY LOCKED UP BECAUSE OF "TECHNICAL VIOLATIONS" OF THEIR PROBATION, AND NOT A NEW OFFENSE.



MENTAL HEALTH

THE PERCENTAGE OF INMATES WITH MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS HAS RISEN SHARPLY OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS, FROM 56% IN 2008 TO 71% TODAY.

56%

71%

Just 6% of San Francisco residents are African American, yet 56% of jail inmates are black, according to a city report issued last week.

By contrast, around 42% of city residents are white, but the group accounts for only 22% of jail residents.

If African Americans and Hispanics were incarcerated at the same rates as whites, prison and jail populations would decline by almost 40%.

Three out of four young black men in Washington, D.C., can expect to serve time behind bars. This is despite the fact that people of all races use and sell drugs at the same rate.



41,000 people are detained by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) separate from any criminal proceedings.

One in every 108 adults was in prison or jail in 2012. One in 28 American children has a parent behind bars.

There are more people behind bars today for a drug offense than there were in 1980 for all offenses combined.

25-50% of the homeless population has a history of incarceration. Homeless people are often forced to engage in criminal activity in order to survive. People who have a criminal record face many barriers to exiting homelessness.

I SEE MY LIFE PASSING, AND I'VE LEARNED

I grew up in the rough part of San Jose; the east side. I ran with the local crew and began to participate in gang activity. My first encounter with the law was at the age of 13. I was arrested for burglarizing my middle school. Because of my age and the degree of the crime, I was released to my mother.

Four months later, I was rearrested; but this time it was for a strong-arm robbery. I ended up serving 16 months. After my release, I was placed in an aftercare program. By that time, I started hanging out more and going to a lot of parties, not realizing I was drifting toward the fast lane.

I unconsciously broke my aftercare agreement and went on the run. I ended up turning myself in six months later, right after summer break. I did a minor three weeks before getting release on EMP (Electrical Monitor Program), aka house arrest.

My max time was 120 days and if I did good, 90 days. During those 90 days, I was arrested twice. The first time was for possession of drugs with the intent to sell, but due to the lack of evidence, I was released the next day. The second time was for too many unauthorized hours out. I got love from my PO [probation officer] because she only gave me two months hall time.

I got out and came back 10 months later for possession of drugs again. And once more, I was let home with a slap on the wrist. I was given 90 days house arrest and with good behavior, only 60 days. I'm glad to say I made it through this time around. I didn't get the good behavior time but the way I see it, I was off.

At 17 years young, feeling fresh and free off of house arrest, my plan was to stay out for good. I started talking to a local pretty female. Next thing I knew, we became a couple. Everything was going to plan. I was heading to school and was hanging out a little less. The relationship got serious fast so now my time was all on her.

My life was going good ... until one day my roll dawg got viciously stabbed to death. Right in my neighborhood.

The next thing I remember, I became numb. It was summer 2011, and by the end of it, I was right back to the place I planned not to be. This time I was charged with two counts of first-degree murder, a conspiracy to murder, three attempted murders and with a gang enhancement on every count. Plus, a string of first-degree burglaries tied in. This is not including the seven attempted murders still being suspected. The combined years of time I was looking at was 300-plus years to life; three life sentences.

Due to my age, I was sent to the maximum-security unit in juvenile hall; B-9. Both my co-defendants went next door to B-8. The DA (District Attorney) decided to direct file us as adults. With me being the oldest out of the three of us, I was the first transfer to county jail.

Fast forward five years later, on the

brink of trial, our DA made a surprise move, due to the lack of evidence in our case. He offered us a group deal. The deal agreement came down to one of us getting 40 years to life and the last two getting 11 years.

By next Monday morning, we all signed on the dotted line and pleaded guilty to voluntary manslaughter with a gang enhancement. Except for one of us, who pleaded guilty to second-degree murder with a gang enhancement and a 25-year gun enhancement. Lucky to say, I was one of the two who got 11 years.

Now I'm sitting here writing this letter in San Quentin State Prison, the oldest and most historic prison in California. I'm currently going on my sixth year, at the age of 22.

I came to realize a lot about myself ... salient things I wouldn't have if not for this journey. As you can see, prior to coming to prison, my background and history made it seem inevitable that this would be my fate.

And with most of my "loyal" homies and the girlfriend I started this journey with, I'm sure you guys can guess correctly where they are now in my life. As time passes, things change and people change.

Not to forget, you change. Nothing stays the same and if I would've asked you how would you feel if in 10 years you would be the same person as before, I'm sure you wouldn't like that.

What made me change myself for the better was seeing my life passing right before my eyes. Having to be placed in a situation where the realization of not coming home is as real as it gets. And witnessing those less fortunate people around me getting wash and never going home.

I'm humble to have a release date and, most importantly, to realizing the value of freedom. At the end of the day, we only have one life to live and it's too precious to waste it on anything else except for happiness. Finding happiness in prison is possible within oneself. But this environment happens to perpetuate anything far from happiness.

This letter is as much for you guys as it is for me. If I can reach one person then the time invested is well worth it. Please take a moment to stop and re-evaluate your life.

Reflect and think of what truly matters to you and how you can obtain happiness. I'm talking about the real happiness and not the false illusion of it.

Try hard to learn from my many mistakes so you would never have to be placed in the same situation. They say a smart man learns from his mistake; but a wise man learns from other people's mistakes.

I send my utmost love and respect to all of you. Stay strong and remain positive. And remember, you have the power to transform your life; nobody else does. Try to slow down from this high speed and listen to The Beat Within. One love.

— CUONG, SAN QUENTIN

never see them unless you get lucky. Your room is four-squared, with a toilet in your room with all the things you need in one room. When I'm in my room, I feel like a dog locked in a cage. Trapped with your mind racing with no way to escape.

The food made me cry my eyes out when it was placed in front of me. I have to survive off of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches to get me by. Other than that, I would rather starve myself.

But that doesn't stop me. I still manage to get up and go to school. Yes, they make us go to school, graduated or not.

But one thing I can say is being in here makes me realize what I have on the outside and to cherish what I have at home. To better myself for me to be successful in life, not for anyone else. This experience has been horrible but a lesson well-learned.

Thank you for letting me share my half of the story of the worst time of my life. Let's not forget I have been away from my phone for over five days. I haven't been away from my phone for over twenty minutes, but I manage to last.

— ADAJAH, ALAMEDA



Art: Richard Zepeda

Formed in October of 2017, the **No Walls Collective** aims to uplift the artwork and stories of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people. We run an online Etsy shop to connect buyers with pieces donated by incarcerated artists to support the livelihood and self-determination of people directly impacted by prisons and jails. All the proceeds directly benefit the contributing artists and ongoing efforts to abolish prisons. Each collective member is connected with loved ones who are currently in prison, and we work together to ensure that their art is seen and appreciated and that their needs are prioritised.

Richard Zepeda is one of the incarcerated artists producing work to sell through the No Walls Collective. Ricky grew up homeless in Los Angeles before spending over a decade in solitary confinement at Pelican Bay State Prison. While at Pelican Bay, he was part of the organizing the 2013 Hunger Strike, starving himself even after being hospitalized because he was so committed to fighting for his rights in prison. Ricky was released directly into downtown Los Angeles in 2015 and was quickly arrested again and is now doing time in Nevada, where he is diligently working on art projects and brainstorming ways to support homeless communities once he is released. His artwork speaks to his heritage and the traumas of incarceration and reflects the vast amount of time he dedicates to his craft.

To support artists like Ricky and the project of the No Walls Collective please visit the Etsy shop at <https://www.etsy.com/shop/NoWallsCollective> or find us on Facebook!

DO YOU REMEMBER?

Do you remember when I first held you?
Do you remember me crying too?
Do you remember you taking your first step?
Do you remember the scrapbook I kept?
Do you remember your first blankie?
Do you remember your first birthday party?
Do you remember me taking you to Disneyland?
Do you remember the beach and the sand?
Do you remember your first day at pre-school?
Do you remember the lunches I packed for you?
Do you remember me picking you up every day?
Do you remember how I would kiss your booboo's pain away?
Do you remember how mom was never there?
Do you remember that mom never really cared?
Do you remember mom being on all those drugs?

Do you remember mom bringing in all those thugs?
Do you remember what those men did to me?
Do you remember mom spending all the rent money?
Do you remember all the bruises I used to have?
Do you remember all those men mom made us call "dad"?'
Do you remember them taking us to foster care?
Do you remember mom losing all of her hair?
Do you remember all those things breaking?
Do you remember us in the corner shaking?
Do you remember the day our mom died?
Do you remember me on my knees begging God why as I cried?
Do you remember all the good times we had?
Or do you remember how the good never outweighed the bad?

— MARKAYLA, LOS ANGELES



These selection of writings is from The Beat Within, whose mission is to provide incarcerated youth with consistent opportunity to share their ideas and life experiences in a safe space that encourages literacy, self-expression, some critical thinking skills, and healthy, supportive relationships with adults and their community. For more info, visit www.TheBeatWithin.org.

letters from prison

CONFESIONS OF AN INVISIBLE FATHER

BY JESSE J

Dear Son,

Today is Father's Day — but to be honest I don't feel as if this day really applies to me — I mean how could it, when I've never been much of a father to you — I was loyal to all the wrong things and chose the streets over my family — and as a result of my choices I spent most of your life in prison.

I feel as if I robbed you of so many things and forced you to grow up without a father — and believe me, I know exactly how that feels because my father did the same thing to me — and I really believe that I spent so much time hating him and blaming him for all the things that have gone wrong in my life that I became the person I hated the most — and I did to you what was done to me — and now here you are in prison for many of the same things that I went to prison for.

I'll never forget the day I got the letter telling me you were now in prison with me — that broke my heart in a million pieces — for I never thought for one second that my son could possibly end up as my cellie one day. I was so mad — but what's crazy is that I was mad at everyone but me! I blamed everyone else — even writing your mom a letter accusing her of not being a good mother — taking no responsibility of my own — I even convinced myself that it couldn't be my fault because I wasn't there! And if I was there I never would have let this happen — and what's even crazier is that it never entered my mind for one second that maybe my not being there was partially to blame for your being in prison — that had I chose my family over the streets and been a father to you maybe you would have made better choices and not followed in my footsteps.

And now you have a son — and if we don't break this cycle then your son may follow in your footsteps. We have to stop this — you still have a chance to be a father to your son — please don't be me — don't do to your son what I did to you! Be the father I never was — the kind of father you always wanted me to be — be the father your son desperately needs and deserves to have! Don't make him have to grow up wondering where his father is at — and why he's never there for him — and if you do hate me then please don't be like me — be better than me!

And although I can't change the mistakes of my past I can change the direction of my life — it's not too late — it's never too late — and I am determined to do just that! To be the man — a father and grandfather I've always wanted to be — to be a positive influence on my family — and I'm not going to let anything get in the way of that! I refuse to be remembered by my mistakes — or allow my mistakes to define me!

Yes — those things are what I've done — but they are not who I am. I get to decide that — I get to decide who I am and who I'm going to be! And I choose to be someone I can be proud of — and my family can be proud of. So I choose to live instead of just existing — sobriety over drugs — freedom over jail and my family over the streets.

And now you must make some real choices about your life for yourself and for your son because he needs you for everything — your presence will be the most important thing in his life — he never has to know what it feels like to grow up without a father — he never has to feel as if he's not wanted or loved! Your choices now will determine what kind of life he has — and if you choose the streets over him the way I did to you — he may end up feeling about you the way you feel about me! And the cycle will continue.

This shhh has to stop! If not, we will have four generations of incarceration — think about how crazy that sounds! But it doesn't have to be that way — we can still change the directions of our lives, so that your son will have a positive path to follow. Imagine how wonderful that will feel to know that we changed our lives to give your son a chance at a real life! That's real fatherhood — and it's never too late to be a father.

I love you, and although I was never there for you — you have always been with me!

Love, Your Father,

Jesse J, San Francisco County Jail

Jesse Jackson, 51, is currently in the San Francisco County Jail for a probation violation. He has spent the better part of the last 35 years in and out of the criminal justice system. This is from the Beat Within, www.TheBeatWithin.org



Art: Colin Matthes

SOLITARY CONFINEMENT REALITY BY RICARDO NOBLE

Whenever I read or hear prison staff, politicians, and others supporting solitary confinement, especially long-term solitary confinement, speak about solitary confinement, they make it seem like being locked up in a cell for 23 or 24 hours a day is no "big deal" or problem physically or psychologically on a person. And, of course, they never speak about the malicious and sadistic things that prison staff do that causes and contributes to the negative physical and psychological effects of solitary confinement. Like maliciously skipping a prisoner's cell for meals, showers, and yard, tampering with/contaminating prisoners' food, tampering/playing games with prisoners' incoming and outgoing mail, cell light on 24 hours a day, giving prisoners cold meals that should be hot and hot meals of food items that should be cold, staff routinely banging on the cell door throughout the night in order to cause sleep deprivation, keeping the cells freezing cold or extremely hot, staff physically abusing prisoners, staff humiliating prisoners, staff falsifying your file, staff lying to you and lying on you, and staff committing other civil and human rights violations against prisoners.

They also tend to make it seem like it's only corrections officers (C.O.s) who subject prisoners in solitary confinement (RHU, SHU, etc.) to such malicious/sadistic treatment. But nurses, counselors, and other prison staff initiate and/or join the campaign of harassment and also help cover-up (hide) the mistreatment of prisoners.

Most of the abuse and deplorable conditions are recorded 24 hours a day on the video cameras stationed throughout the solitary confinement cell blocks (housing units.) And all

prison staff (counselors, nurses, religious staff, etc.) who come through the solitary confinement housing units (RHUs, SHUs, SMUs, etc.) daily have witnessed or are aware of the abuse, terrible conditions, etc. But they don't do or, at least, say anything about it, even though their job description requires them to. So, they are just as guilty and vicious as the actual victimizers. They don't even have to use their own names. Department of corrections ("D.O.C.") policy states that everyone (prisoners and staff) can report abuse of prisoners, deplorable prison conditions, etc., anonymously. But said staff say and do nothing. Instead, they stay quiet and fool themselves into believing that they are still "good people" because they are not the staff member who is actually or directly committing said atrocities against prisoners.

Most abuse of prisoners and terrible prison conditions are unreported and undocumented, so statistics don't even scratch the surface of the reality of what's going on. Also, judges and the courts encourage and allow prison staff's/official's malicious and sadistic violations of prisoners' civil and human rights by pretending that prisoners' lawsuits that have merit don't have merit, making it harder for prisoners to file and get relief from lawsuits and other complaints, seldom punishing guilty prison staff, and giving prison staff/officials punishments that are so light that they are meaningless.

Prisoners' voices (pleas for assistance, relief) are often heard but ignored. So, the physical and psychological torture of prisoners continues to be a harsh reality encouraged/allowed throughout the United States of America.

COALITION ON HOMELESSNESS

The STREET SHEET is a project of the Coalition on Homelessness. The Coalition on Homelessness organizes poor and homeless people to create permanent solutions to poverty while protecting the civil and human rights of those forced to remain on the streets.

Our organizing is based on extensive peer outreach, and the information gathered directly drives the Coalition's work. We do not bring our agenda to poor and homeless people: They bring their agenda to us. We then turn that agenda into powerful campaigns that are fleshed out at our work group meetings, where homeless people come together with their other community allies to win housing and human rights for all homeless and poor people.

WORKGROUP MEETINGS

AT 468 TURK STREET

HOUSING JUSTICE WORK GROUP

Every Tuesday at noon

The Housing Justice Workgroup is working toward a San Francisco in which every human being can have and maintain decent, habitable, safe, and secure housing. This meeting is in English and Spanish and open to everyone!

HUMAN RIGHTS WORK GROUP

Every Wednesday at 12:30 p.m.

The Human Rights Workgroup has been doing some serious heavy lifting on these issues: conducting direct research, outreach to people on the streets, running multiple campaigns, developing policy, staging direct actions, capturing media attention, and so much more. All those down for the cause are welcome to join!

To learn more about COH workgroup meetings, contact us at: 415-346-3740, or go at: www.cohsf.org

STREET SHEET STAFF

The Street Sheet is a publication of the Coalition on Homelessness. Some stories are collectively written, and some stories have individual authors. But whoever sets fingers to keyboard, all stories are formed by the collective work of dozens of volunteers, and our outreach to hundreds of homeless people.

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DUSTY ORANGE BY DONALD RAY YOUNG

Early morning clanging of plastic trays, moving anxiously through metal food ports, signify breakfast time. Come and get it. The rusty, metal tray slots open, and a dusty, burnt orange tray slides into my isolation cell. As my stomach grumbles, awaiting relief, my eyes rest upon a single piece of stale, flat coffee cake, topped with a small mound of dark brown, fear inspiring peanut butter. Holding a sinister grin on his face, a young guard inquires, "Wanna trade your shower for an extra tray?"

Having recently relocated, from the East Block, into the Adjustment Center's solitary confinement, minus my personal property, hygienic articles and stationery, I now exist within the cold shadow of the gallows. Who am I to turn down this unpalatable gift? Famished, my body craves nourishment. Why shouldn't I barter away my five minute shower? After all, I am scheduled for three showers a week, but I have not showered in four days. It's interesting how our priorities change, depending on our living circumstances.

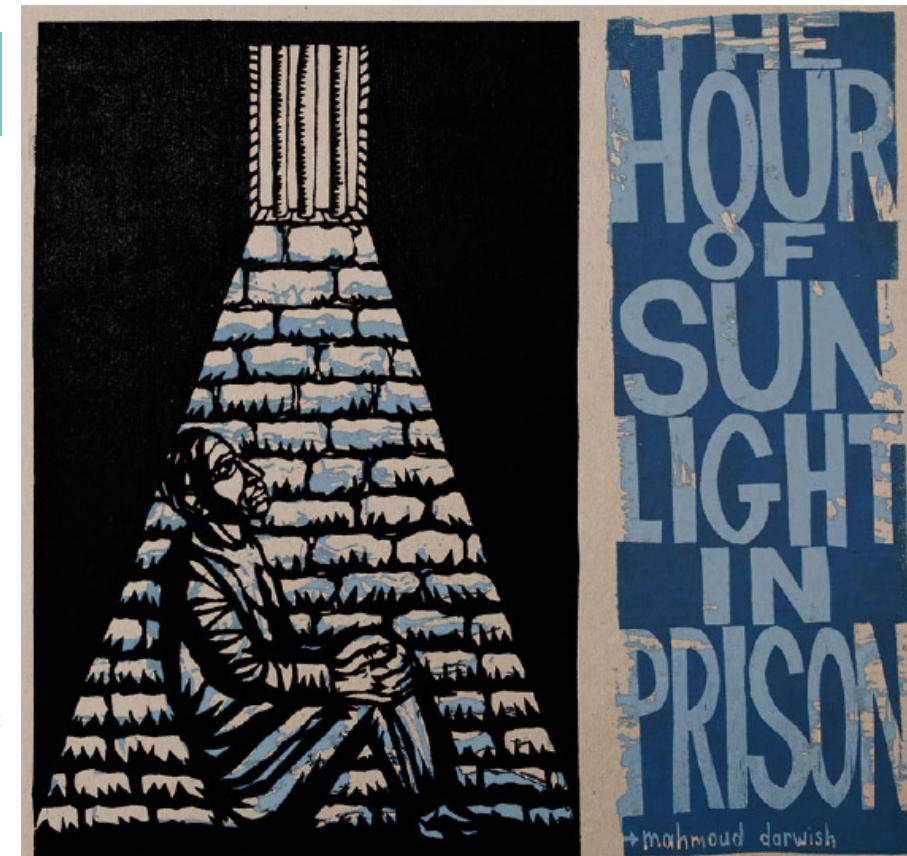
As I hold the dry, hardened coffee cake in my mouth, hoping it will become moist enough to swallow, my thoughts take me back to a time when my pride was the only thing that had to be swallowed. I had once requested, from good friends, any amount of monetary support. Because we are not allowed to

hold jobs in this part of the prison, donations would have been my one opportunity to purchase food from the canteen. I was soon assured, in a friendly letter, that the prison diet was quite capable of sustaining me.

As I swallow my pastry, I am hopeful that it will satisfy my intense hunger. Doubts whirl through the corridors of my mind. I ask myself how important that shower is. My self-discipline and fortitude are essential. I will take my five minute shower. "No thanks. I had better get under that water."

The guards stop asking if I want to trade my shower for an extra tray of nourishment. Days slither into weeks. As they deliver my food, the guards start showing two fingers, in a backward peace sign. We are participants in a war of attrition. Proudly, my head moves from side to side, in resistance to their minuscule offers. I am now three weeks into this nutrition-less, unbalanced weight loss diet of no choice, and things start to look up.

As the dusty food tray slides into my cage, I discover eggs and potatoes are the daily offer. Immediately, I throw up the backwards peace sign. I am gifted with two dusty, burnt orange breakfast trays. This time, my stomach is the winner of this struggle for necessity. Life is almost good.



Art: Erin Ruin

THE NEED TO END MASS INCARCERATION BY MWALIMU S. SHAKUR

"It is fair to say that we have witnessed an evolution in the United States from a racial caste system based entirely on exploitation (slavery), to one based largely on subordination (Jim Crow), to one defined by marginalization (mass incarceration)." - Professor Michelle Alexander, 'The New Jim Crow'

Let's talk about this mass incarceration for a little bit. We from the inner city face all the hardships in this country, and by design we were meant to be destroyed, by the fascist elite who control all the world's wealth through their capitalist economic system. For big business to thrive, it needs labor, and just like our New Afrikan Ancestors who first reached these shores to further enhance the agenda of the slave masters, we the prison class are the new laborers meant to increase the wealth of the imperialists who place us in their prison systems.

Here in California, an inmate is worth one thousand dollars a day, so once the drug epidemic spread throughout, the lawmakers created laws that were designed to be broken, and incarcerated men and women at rapid speed. As in the "three strikes and you're out" law, and mandatory minimums for drug offenses.

Once they take what little money you may have had by way of court fees and restitution charges, they let the state get the rest, and I'm sure there are a few incentives coming their way for establishing the process.

Case in point, the Attorney General Jeff Sessions has made the attempt to do away with what President Obama put

in place to release non-violent offenders and petty drug offenders, by informing the D.A.s they have the right to process all drug traffickers (and I'm sure any and all other drug-related cases, no matter how small) to the longest extent of the law.

Instead of releasing and rehabilitating inmates, he wants them to stay in prison where they can continue to be worth money for the courts, the lobbyists, and the federal and state prisons that house them. I stated already that laws were created to be broken. Well with no education, the removal of industrial jobs from the inner cities to the suburbs, the taking away of Government sponsored programs (like low income housing and welfare), you force people from the inner city to survive by any means necessary, which will allow you to lock them up if the means are criminal.

I believe the book Mass Incarceration/The New Jim Crow in the Age of Colorblindness by Michelle Alexander is a must read for anyone wanting to educate themselves and their family on the injustices done by this oppressive slave system. Anyone wanting to learn other alternatives to staying out of prison may write to me at the address given below. My name is Mwalimu Shakur, and I'm a New Afrikan freedom fighter, dedicated to the struggle of my people by teaching them critical thinking skills, as opposed to the criminal element they could be faced with.

In Solidarity Struggle / Mwalimu S. Shakur / a servant of the people



THE DIATRIBES OF A MORNING STARR

BY KRYSTA MARIE MORNINGSTARR

Krysta is an incarcerated trans woman in Texas and has written several letters to ABO Comix over the course of the last few months. She's been studying manga art for four years, has diplomas in creative writing and paralegal, and is a strong advocate for the trans community. She aspires to be a published comic book artist.

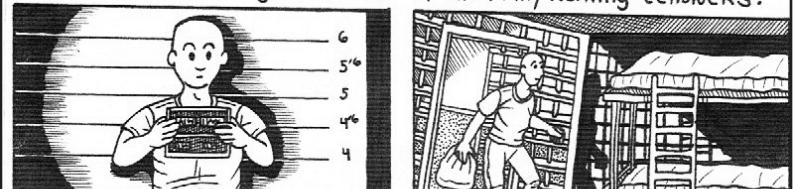
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SHADES OF GREY

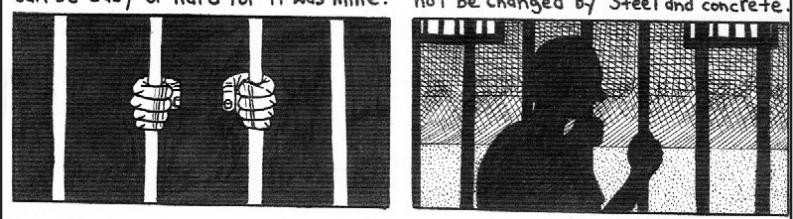
I was 22 on the day I entered the gates of Louisiana State Penitentiary, Infamously called Angola for short. As the bus took us to Death Row for processing I wondered if I would ever see those gates again.



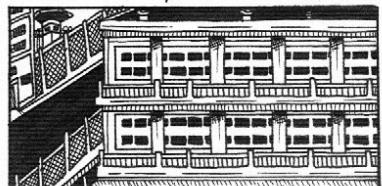
Death Row was not unlike a zoo. We heard the caged screams as our heads were shaved and given numbers.



Classification assigned us living quarters and I was sent to one of the many working cellblocks. Survival was important but I also wanted to preserve my identity and not be changed by steel and concrete.



Before the lights went out I wrote my mom a letter. I let her know A-Block is my new residence.



Mom raised three kids all by herself. Her hands were full just keeping us under a roof and food on the table.



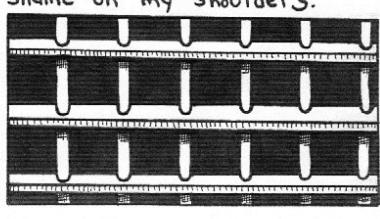
I never thought the party would end. It did though, with me in handcuffs for a murder charge.



By the age of fourteen I was an alcoholic, drug addict and trying to be with as many girls as possible.



Until my death I will carry an enormous amount of guilt and shame on my shoulders.



This is Hector, an orderly for A-Block. He woke me to tell me I had a hospital callout.



As the guard handcuffed me I found out all new arrivals have to get physicals for a duty status.



Prison hospitals differ little from the All maximum security inmates have ones outside the gates. They all live in these holding cells on very cold, smell of bleach and death.



The nurse was friendly even if she was preparing me to uphold the was a hot shower and sleep. My first "Hard Labor" part of my life sentence, full day at Angola was quite an experience.



ABO Comix is an anthology of stories amplifying the voices of queer and trans prisoners. Their team consists of three angry queers who have been involved in prison abolition and other advocacy work for years. They also really, really like comics. Through bridging these two passions, ABO hopes this anthology will help folks on the inside get their stories and art out into the world and get some much needed \$\$\$ into their commissary accounts. All of ABO's content is made by queer prisoners and 100% of the profits will go right back to them. ABO Comix will be available December 2nd at abocomix.bigcartel.com, and will have a release party at 1-2-3-4 GO! that evening. Follow them for updates at facebook.com/abocomix.

political prisoners

What is a political prisoner—and does the U.S. have them?

What is a Political Prisoner and Prisoner of War?

Political Prisoner: A person incarcerated for actions carried out in support of legitimate struggles for self determination* or for opposing the illegal policies of the government and/or its political sub-divisions. (Special International Tribunal on the Violation of Human Rights of Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War in the United States Prisons and Jails, December, 1990)

Prisoner of War: Those combatants struggling against colonial and alien domination and racist regimes captured as prisoners are to be accorded the status of prisoner of war and their treatment should be in accordance with the provisions of the Geneva Conventions Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War. (August 12, 1949, General Assembly Resolution 3103 [XXVIII])

Does the U.S. Hold Political Prisoners? When the subject of prisons are brought up, most people make the assumption

that prisons are places that “bad” people are kept to keep the rest of us safe and to punish people for their “bad” or “evil” behavior. People usually realize that prisons are used as a mechanism of social-control and a repository of socially oppressed populations.

Comparatively, when the subject of political prisoners or prisoners of war is mentioned, as a person imprisoned for their political beliefs or actions, one conjures up images of a totalitarian governments or some despotic authoritarian manner of dealing with dissidents. Rarely does one think of amerikkka, as a country that holds its citizens in such a state. Afterall, amerikkka claims to be a democracy and denies the existence of political prisoners and prisoners of war.

Yet, there are about 100 political prisoners in various prisons across the United States. These women and men are listed and recognized as political prisoners by numerous human rights, legal defense and progressive/socialist organizations. These people all come from the Civil Rights/Black Power/

New African Liberation struggles, the Puerto Rican Independence Movement, Indigenous Peoples survival struggles, Chicano/Mexicano Movements, anti-imperialist/anti-war movements, anti-racist/anti-fascist struggles, the Women’s Movement, social and economic justice struggles, and especially in the past several years, from the Environmental/Animal Rights movement. They are Black, white, Latino and Native American. Most of these political prisoners have been in captivity since the 1970s and 80s. Some were convicted on totally fabricated charges, others for nebulous political conspiracies or for acts of resistance. All received huge sentences for their political beliefs or actions in support of these beliefs.

Additionally, there are many thousands of revolutionary minded, politically conscious prisoners in U.S. jails. These are people who became more politically aware and active once they landed in prison. A lot of these prisoners also get singled out for extra harsh and restrictive treatment like the political prisoners. Since 9/11, the U.S. has also imprisoned thousands of Arab and Muslim visitors to this country, as well as some Islamic citizens and residents.

During the Jimmy Carter

administration, Ambassador to the United Nations and civil right icon, Andrew Young, admitted there were scores of political prisoners being held in the U.S. This statement by Young, embarrassed the President Carter and Young was rebuked by the President and was forced to backpedal on his statement.

Who Are America’s Political Prisoners & Prisoners of War?

This is a list of individuals who are currently incarcerated in the U.S., who became targets because of their actions threatening US imperial power, and who were imprisoned for their political beliefs and activity. This list is not exhaustive by any means.

National groups such as the Jericho Movement are have been formed with the defined goal of gaining recognition of the fact that political prisoners and prisoners of war exist inside of the United States, despite the Unite States’ government’s continued denial ... and winning amnesty and freedom for these political prisoners. A more extensive list and information on these men and women can be found at www.thejerichomovement.com. ■

What’s the Call? Free ‘em all!!!



LEO SCHWARTZ

From October 15th to October 19th, 126 prisoners went on a hunger strike at the Glenn Dyer Detention Facility in downtown Oakland. Their primary grievance was indefinite solitary confinement, a practice that continues due to semantic loopholes.

The strike was organized under the umbrella of Prisoners United, a coalition of incarcerated individuals representing jails and prisons across the Bay Area.

On Thursday morning, a group of family and friends of Prisoners United gathered outside of the Alameda County Administrative Building, located just a few blocks from Glenn Dyer. The Board of Supervisors was holding a Public Protection meeting and had agreed to hear their testimony, alongside a report from the Alameda County Sheriff's Office.

Before attending the hearing, the group stood in a circle and went around sharing what the strike meant to them. One of the speakers was John Jones III, a community organizer and life coach for the Oakland-based Communities United for Restorative Youth Justice (CURYJ). He stressed that the strike wasn't only about ending solitary confinement or allowing inmates to change their clothes more than once a week. It was about shared humanity, and recognizing the inmates as people. To the Sheriff and Board of Supervisors, he

offered a simple demand: "These folks must honor life."

Administrative Segregation

When individuals are arrested in Alameda County, they are either taken to Glenn Dyer or the larger Santa Rita Jail, which is the fifth largest in the country. This means that the majority of inmates housed at the two facilities have yet to be convicted.

Even so, 82 of the roughly 400 prisoners at Glenn Dyer are held in what is referred to as administrative segregation, where they are kept in cells separate from the general population for a minimum of 23 hours per day. As Sheriff's Captain Dave Blanchard presented at the hearing, inmates can be held in administrative segregation for periods of weeks to even years.

According to Juan Méndez, the UN Special Rapporteur on torture, solitary confinement is defined as any practice where an inmate is held in isolation from others for at least 22 hours a day. He recommended an absolute prohibition on any prolonged solitary confinement that lasts longer than 15 days.

The Sheriff's Office, however, denies that the inmates are held in solitary confinement. They refer to the practice as administrative segregation because their cells are not in total isolation. They can still hear other inmates. They just cannot leave their cells.

Moreover, inmates held in adminis-

hunger strike

82 of the 400 prisoners at Glenn Dyer Detention Facility are kept in cells separate from the general population for a minimum of 23 hours a day.

istrative segregation lose many of their visitation rights. According to Jones, the practice does not only impact the inmates. It also impacts their families. At the hearing, he testified that one of the dehumanizing aspects of imprisonment is reducing people to names like "inmate, convict, and criminal," when they are actually "son, mother, and loved one."

Compounding the problem is the issue of classification. Glenn Dyer ostensibly institutes administrative segregation for the prisoners' own safety. Their aim is to separate potential gang members from the general population.

To achieve this, the jail classifies inmates as they enter, designating inmates as gang members and subjecting them to administrative segregation without a transparent process or the ability to appeal.

Hunger Strikes

California prisons have a long history of hunger strikes. Almost 30,000 California prisoners participated in a hunger strike in 2013, protesting the same issue of indefinite solitary confinement. The strike originated from Security Housing Unit, or SHU, at the Pelican Bay State Prison, where prisoners were confined indefinitely for a minimum of 22.5 hours a day.

The hunger strike resulted in the class action lawsuit Ashker v. Governor of California, brought forward by inmates housed in the SHU, including leaders and participants of the hunger strike. The case was held in September 2015 and resulted in the end of indefinite SHU terms in California state prisons, as well as a reduction in the amount of inmates held in solitary confinement. While inmates had previously been subjected to the SHU for decades, the maximum confinement term was restricted to ten years.

In October 2016, more than 100 inmates at the Santa Clara County jails held a hunger strike to protest continued grievances regarding solitary confinement. While Santa Clara County Sheriff Laurie Smith maintained that solitary confinement had been abolished, inmates asserted that any free time was held in virtual isolation. Furthermore, an inmates' advocacy group

filed a lawsuit claiming that one prisoner had not seen sunlight or breathed fresh air for seven months.

While the hunger strike was supposed to last for two weeks, the inmates ended it after three days because they thought their demands were being addressed. However, no indication of progress was made in the following year. Prisoners United formed to revive the hunger strikes.

Next Steps

Alongside Glenn Dyer, Prisoners United is also planning hunger strikes in Santa Clara County Main Jail, Elmwood Correctional Complex, and the Santa Rita Jail.

The group organized outside of the administrative building on Thursday came to represent the incarcerated. Some were loved ones, some were local activists. They each had a story to share.

One man, Dauras Cyprian, came with the community organization All of Us or None. He had been incarcerated for 26 years, spending six of them in solitary confinement. Since leaving prison, he has worked for the Ban-the-Box movement, which would make it illegal for employers to include application questions on an applicant's conviction history. He is also earning his baccalaureate degree in social work.

Like Jones, Cyprian emphasized that Prisoners United was not only fighting for issues like solitary confinement. They were fighting for awareness. According to Cyprian, the public needs to understand the dehumanizing conditions that inmates are subjected to, and why it is so difficult for many to return to society after the ordeals they face in jail.

At the hearing, Alameda County Supervisors Scott Haggerty and Richard Valle listened compassionately to the testimony. They indicated they would put pressure on the Sheriff's Office to make changes, with Supervisor Valle saying "How we treat each other as human beings is critically important."

The people in the room had heard similar rhetoric before. The next hunger strike is always in the works. ■

VOLUNTEER & DONATE TO ORGS DOIN' THE WORK!

California Coalition for Women Prisoners is a grassroots social justice organization, with members inside and outside prison, that challenges the institutional violence imposed on women, transgender people, and communities of color by the prison industrial complex (PIC). We see the struggle for racial and gender justice as central to dismantling the PIC and we prioritize the leadership of the people, families, and communities most impacted in building this movement. www.womenprisoners.org

Critical Resistance seeks to build an international movement to end the Prison Industrial Complex by challenging the belief that caging and controlling people makes us safe. We believe that basic necessities such as food, shelter, and freedom are what really make our communities secure. As such, our work is part of global struggles against inequality and powerlessness. The success of the movement requires that it reflect communities most affected by the Prison Industrial Complex. Because we seek to abolish the PIC, we cannot support any work that extends its life or scope. www.criticalresistance.org

The Ella Baker Center works locally, statewide, and nationally to end mass incarceration and criminalization. We mobilize everyday people to build power and prosperity in our communities. We are named after Ella Baker, a brilliant, black hero of the civil rights movement. Following in her footsteps, we organize with Black, Brown, and low-income people to shift resources away from prisons and punishment, and towards opportunities that make our communities safe, healthy, and strong. www.ellabakercenter.org

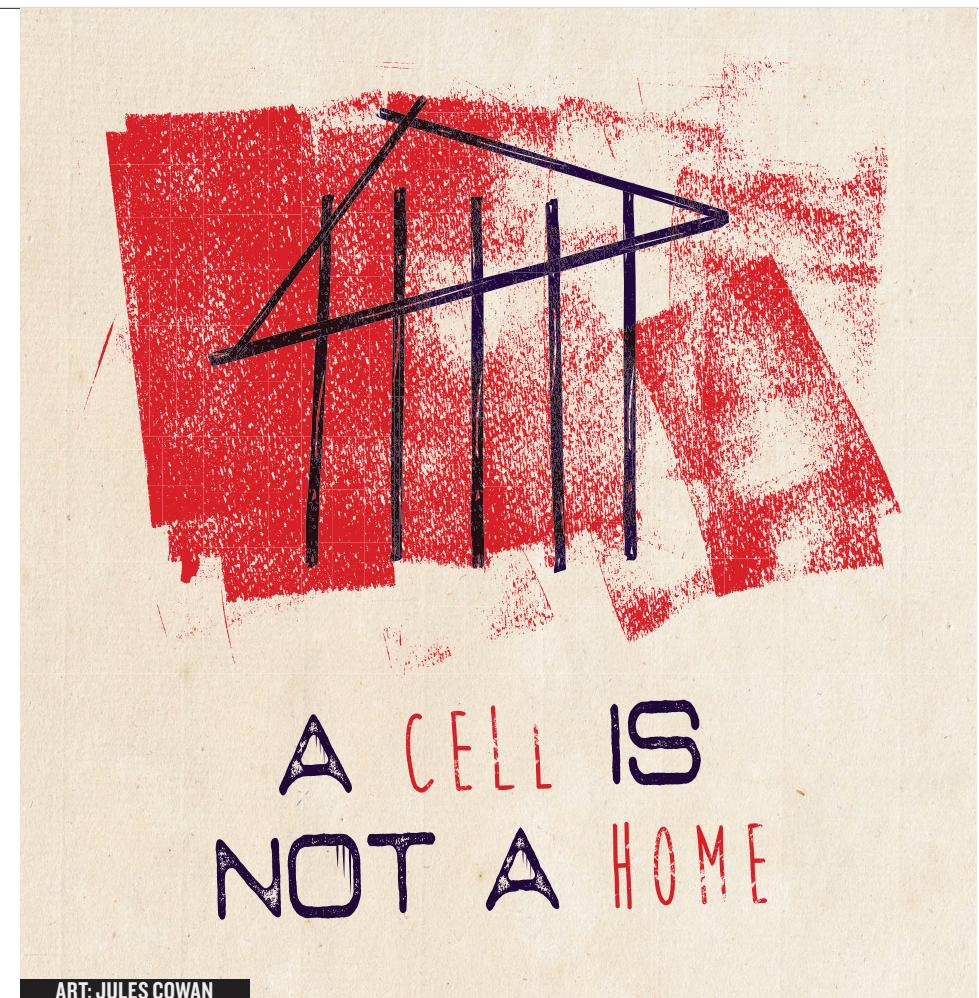
Prison Activist Resource Center (PARC) is a prison abolitionist group committed to exposing and challenging all forms of institutionalized racism, sexism, able-ism, heterosexism, and classism, specifically within the Prison Industrial Complex (PIC). PARC believes in building strategies and tactics that build safety in our communities without reliance on the police or the PIC. We produce a directory that is free to prisoners upon request, and seek to work in solidarity with prisoners, ex-prisoners, their friends and families. www.prisonactivist.org

TGI Justice Project is a group of transgender, gender variant and intersex people—inside and outside of prisons, jails and detention centers—creating a united family in the struggle for survival and freedom. We work in collaboration with others to forge a culture of resistance and resilience to strengthen us for the fight against human rights abuses, imprisonment, police violence, racism, poverty, and societal pressures. We seek to create a world rooted in self-determination, freedom of expression, and gender justice. www.tgijp.org

GET A PEN PAL

Looking for a way to take concrete action against the system of mass incarceration? Get a pen pal and support someone on the inside.

Human Rights Pen Pals is a grassroots, racial justice community organization, in solidarity with people in California's solitary confinement cells. Through letter writing and community organizing, we promote principled, mutually educational relationships between people in solitary confinement and human rights supporters outside the prison walls. www.humanrightspenpals.org



ART: JULES COWAN

SUPPORT THEIR FAMILIES & LOVED ONES

Volunteer with organizations supporting the loved ones of incarcerated folks.

Friends Outside provides services and support to visitors at each California State Prison, and are located outside the prison walls but on prison grounds (usually adjacent to the visitor parking lots). Visitor Centers provide childcare, transportation, information and resources, and a restful and welcoming place to stop for a moment before and after visits. Does not usually respond to letters. www.friendsoutside.org

CIVIC seeks to end the isolation and abuse of people in immigration detention by building and strengthening visitation programs. We provide resources, training, and capacity building support to a network of visitation programs across the United States. www.endisolation.org

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OR MAIL TO 468 TURK ST. SF, CA 94102**

WRITER'S CORNER

Irina Ratushinskaya was locked up in a Russian Gulag in the 1980s, charged with being a poet who wrote about human rights. The conditions were exceptionally brutal. Ratushinskaya wrote most of her poems with a sharpened matchstick on a bar of soap. She then memorized the poem and washed her hands to erase what she'd scratched from the soap.

She wrote:

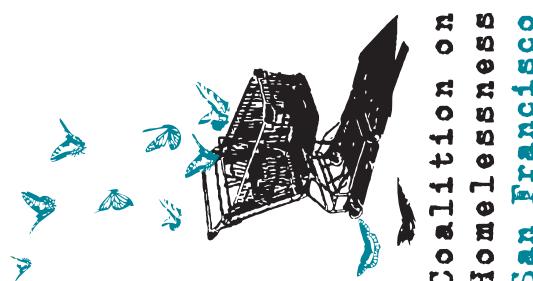
*Give me a nickname, prison,
this first April
evening of sadness
shared with you...*

Ratushinskaya is speaking to prison as though prison were a person she could talk to. Write your own poem to Prison as though it is something you are speaking directly to. What would you say to Prison? This can be the literal prison that you are in—or a figurative prison, something that is confining or trapping you.

You can try starting the poem with the line: "Dear Prison."

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